

**Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office
Earth Day Celebration
April 22, 2003**

Welcome and Introductory Program Remarks By



**Charles E. Roberson
Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Program Management and Operations**

Good morning and welcome, everyone. I'm delighted to have you all with us this morning as we celebrate Earth Day 2003.

I'm Chuck Roberson, Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for Program Management and Operations with the Office of Acquisition and Materiel Management.

My office has operational responsibility for VA's environmental programs. We coordinate the "Greening the Government" executive orders, develop VA environmental policy, and generally ensure that VA is complying with Federal requirements. We also advocate environmentally-friendly practices, such as recycling and buying recycled content products, and help implement them throughout the VA system.

We are honored to have with us this morning a number of distinguished guests: The honorable William H. Campbell, Assistant Secretary for Management and VA's Environmental Executive; Ms. Rebecca R. Wodder, President of American Rivers; and, Mr. John L. Howard, Jr., Federal Environmental Executive.

Also, joining us today are the winners of VA's Closing the Circle Award for 2003. Representing the Beverly National Cemetery Team, from Beverly, New Jersey, are Dee Blake and Bill West. Sharon Ricketts Williams and her Associate Director Cathi Spivey-Paul are here with us from the VA Illiana Health Care System in Danville, Illinois. These folks will be recognized later on in the program for their innovative recycling efforts that not only greatly benefit the environment, but also their facilities through significant cost savings and income generation.

Today marks the 33rd anniversary of Earth Day. Founded in 1970 by former Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson, Earth Day brought much needed national attention to environmental issues. Due in large measure to Senator Nelson and the 20 million people who celebrated the first Earth Day, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was created, and vital environmental legislation—the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and, the Endangered Species Act—was enacted.

Earth Day went international in 1990, with 200 million people in 141 different nations celebrating Mother Earth. As VA observes Earth Day today, so are millions of people across the Nation and the globe, involved in a wide variety of events and activities designed to focus attention on and benefit the environment.

Protecting and preserving our environment is everyone's responsibility. We have made great strides in improving the health of our environment since 1970, but we must continue to act, on a daily basis, at work, at home, in our communities, to ensure a clean and healthy environment for our children and grandchildren. We need to ensure that our natural resources—our forests, our water, our sources of energy—are not depleted, but are abundantly available for them. What we do today, affects future generations tomorrow.

On that note, I'd like to introduce the "Butterflies," a group of pre-school children from the U.S. Kids Childcare Development Center, and their teachers, Ms. Stephanie Witt, Ms. Damelia Boyd, and Mr. Tony Martin. The children will perform "This Land is Your Land, This Land is My Land." Before they begin, I am proud to say that VA Central Office provides support to U.S. Kids through our recycling rebates from the General Services Administration. Now, let's welcome the "Butterflies."

Now, I'm pleased to introduce Bill Campbell. Bill was sworn in as VA's Assistant Secretary for Management and Chief Financial Officer on November 27, 2002, and serves as VA's Environmental Executive. He previously served as VA's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Finance and Deputy Chief Financial Officer since October 2000.

Prior to joining VA, Bill was Chief Financial Officer for the Coast Guard. He holds a master's degree in technical management from Johns Hopkins University, a diploma in resource management from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, and a bachelor's degree in marine and electrical engineering from the Massachusetts Maritime Academy. A member of the Senior Executive Service since 1985, Bill is a recipient of the Presidential Senior Executive Service Distinguished Rank Award.

I'm delighted to have this opportunity to introduce Rebecca Wodder, President of American Rivers. Ms. Wodder participated in the first Earth Day as a teenager, and about a decade later, served on the staff of Senator Gaylord Nelson, with responsibility for environmental and energy issues. She worked several years for The Wilderness Society and, in 1995, became president of American Rivers, a leading, national river conservation organization.

Ms. Wodder helped found Earth Share, a coalition of national environmental groups working to promote charitable environmental giving in the workplace. In 1998, the American Sport Fishing Association named Rebecca Wodder "Woman of the Year" for her advocacy on behalf of clean, healthy rivers. Ms. Wodder earned undergraduate degrees in biology and environmental studies from the University of Kansas, and masters' degrees in landscape architecture and water resources management from the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Thank you, again, Ms. Wodder, for joining us today, and for those very inspiring remarks. Please accept this Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of your commitment to the

environment and your participation in our Earth Day celebration. You'll be interested to know that the frame is made of 100% reclaimed barn wood.

We're very fortunate to have with us today John Howard. Mr. Howard is the Federal Environmental Executive. President George W. Bush appointed him to this vital environmental leadership role on April 30, 2002.

Previously, Mr. Howard was the senior Associate Director for the White House Council on Environmental Quality, and the Director of the Environment and Natural Resources Policy for then-Governor Bush. He also has worked as an environmental attorney in Washington, D.C., and Austin, Texas. Mr. Howard graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Baylor University and received his law degree from the University of Texas.

Thank you Mr. Howard. On behalf of VA, I would like to present you with this Certificate of Appreciation for the commitment you and your staff bring to the environment, and for providing guidance and direction to Federal agencies to ensure we all do the right thing.

And, now, we come to one of my most favorite parts of our annual Earth Day programs—the presentation of VA's Closing the Circle Award—the Department's top environmental award.

Innovation, community partnering, and conservation-focused thinking characterize the Beverly National Cemetery Team's award-winning *Leaf Recycling* project. Each autumn, leaves from more than 1,000 deciduous trees rain down on cemetery grounds. The Team forged a partnership with the Town of Delanco's Recycling Center that includes the recycling of excess leaves and trees into quality topsoil for the care and renovation of gravesites at no charge to the Beverly National Cemetery. This cooperative endeavor not only provided significant, direct cost savings, including \$60,000 for equipment the cemetery did not have to buy, thanks to their community partnership, but also delivered an excellent medium for grass seed and gravesite renovation, and resulted in an improved turf appearance to honor our Nation's veterans.

Sharon Ricketts Williams of the VA Illiana Health Care System is neither a stranger to the recycling program, nor to the Closing the Circle Awards program. In 1999, she won both a White House and VA Closing the Circle Award for an exceptional waste prevention and recycling project as part of a team effort at the VA Illiana Health Care System. This year, her consistently outstanding contributions to the environment have earned her an individual VA Closing the Circle Award.

Sharon employs the "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" philosophy to assist VA Illiana in meeting the needs of its customers—patients, employees, service organizations, and the community. Reducing waste, redirecting equipment needs, recycling and buying recycled products are woven into daily operations at the medical center in resourceful and diverse ways, benefiting the medical center through both cost avoidance and revenue generation, for a total of nearly \$20,000. As Sharon notes, "full environmental compliance is not a goal; it is an expectation," at the VA Illiana Health Care System. This is a philosophy I am confident we share throughout VA.

I also want to take this time to recognize and applaud three Honorable Mentions in this year's VA Closing the Circle Awards: John A. Flowers of the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center in Phoenix, Arizona for Desert Landscaping; Stephen P. Quigley of the Northampton VA Medical Center in Leeds, Massachusetts, for Pesticide Free Facility; and, the Engineering and the Environmental Management and Acquisition and Materiel Management Services Team of the North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System in Gainesville/Lake City, Florida, for their Recycling Program, which included recycling an old smoking shed into a greenhouse, whose plants and flowers are used throughout the hospital.

That brings us to the end of our program, but not to the end of our Earth Day festivities at VA Central Office. I invite you to share in the refreshments set up just outside this room, and to take the elevator, or the stairs, down to our C-Level Canteen. From now until 2:00 p.m., we will have on display there a wide range of environmentally friendly, recycled-content, and ergonomic products. Stop by and pick up some "green" samples and learn about the many ways you can help protect and preserve our environment.

Thank you, and, remember, by protecting our environment today, we are building a healthier tomorrow for our children and grandchildren.

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Program Remarks By



**William H. Campbell
Assistant Secretary for Management
VA Environmental Executive**

Thank you, Chuck, and good morning everyone. It's my pleasure to be with you today as we observe the 33rd anniversary of Earth Day.

As Chuck noted, millions of people across the world have participated in thousands of events focused on the environment since Earth Day was founded in 1970. And, now, as you have seen, we have a new generation of environmentalists. Those children were terrific, and one of the reasons we must strengthen our commitment and continue our actions to protect our environment.

I would like to thank our special guest speakers, Rebecca Wodder and John Howard, for joining us this morning. And, I look forward to recognizing Sharon Ricketts Williams and the Beverly National Cemetery Team later on in the program for their dynamic environmental programs.

I take great pride in talking about VA success stories and in recognizing those among us who lead the way. I also take pride in serving as the Department of Veterans Affairs' Environmental Executive, and I want to share with you what that means for me and for all of us at VA.

As Environmental Executive, I am responsible for overseeing VA's environmental programs and policies, and for ensuring that our entire Department complies with all Federal environmental mandates. One such mandate, "Greening the Government Through Waste Prevention, Recycling, and Federal Acquisition," simply put, requires that VA must: reduce waste, recycle, and buy "green."

Secretary Principi and I are committed to having VA lead the way on environmental issues, as we are on issues relating to our mission to serve our Nation's veterans and their families. We support and encourage all VA employees to participate in programs that prevent or reduce waste, promote recycling and energy efficiency, and increase our "green" purchasing efforts.

To buy "green" means that we need to include certain environmental objectives in our purchasing plans for goods and services. This goes hand-in-hand with getting the best value for taxpayers' dollars.

At VA, we have policies in place that encourage us to buy products that are environmentally-friendly, such as recycled-content products. Under the Federal Acquisition Regulation, revised in 1997, all Federal agencies are required to buy green. As a result, we must include “green” language in all VA specifications, solicitations, statements of work, contracts, and evaluations.

The responsibility to buy “green” extends to those purchases made by purchase card. Every VA employee who is authorized to use a purchase card must comply with this requirement.

Another “Greening the Government” executive order is “Greening the Government Through Leadership in Environmental Management.” Among other requirements, this mandate calls for Federal agencies to implement an Environmental Management System, or EMS, at all appropriate facilities by December 31, 2005.

What is an EMS? It’s a business plan that incorporates environmental considerations into decision-making and day-to-day operations. An EMS extends environmental responsibility beyond the environmental program office to all VA employees, regardless of position. Everyone at VA is responsible for minimizing the impact on the environment. An EMS also calls for a regular review of our environmental efforts and progress, and for continual improvement. This is a responsibility that I take very seriously, and I know you do as well.

What can we do, on a daily basis, to ensure a healthy and sustainable environment? Here are just a few ideas we can all think about:

1. Prevent or reduce waste: One simple example is paper—increase your use of electronic communications; copy on both sides of a sheet of paper; use the blank side of a printed sheet of paper for drafts.
2. Recycle at work, at home, and in your community: paper, plastic, aluminum cans, and glass.
3. Close the loop and buy recycled-content products.
4. Conserve energy and water: Computer monitors, for example, drain an average of 70 watts of power versus 30 for the CPU. When you shut down your CPU for the day, whether at home or at work, turn off the monitor as well.
5. Reduce air pollution by using public transportation or an alternative- fueled vehicle. Speaking of alternative-fueled vehicles, I hope you’ll hop on board the USDA’s bio-diesel or “soy” shuttle bus that will be making a stop in front of our building today.
6. Participate in local clean-up efforts for rivers, streams, parks, playgrounds, or other community areas.
7. Learn more about environmental issues and get involved. Working together, we can make a difference.

Now, I'd like to share with you some of VA's successes. In addition to the examples set by the winners of VA's Closing the Circle Award, which we will hear about shortly, VA employees nationwide have demonstrated good environmental stewardship in a number of ways. Here are two VA facilities that exemplify leadership in energy conservation:

- In 2002, the Department of Energy honored VA Salt Lake City Health Care System with a Federal Energy and Water Management Award. This prestigious award recognized Salt Lake City's outstanding contributions toward increased energy efficiency, renewable energy and water conservation within the Federal sector.
- The Atlanta VA Regional Office Building was awarded the Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star Label for Commercial Buildings in October 2002. The Energy Star label signifies excellence in energy performance and distinguishes the Atlanta Veterans Affairs Regional Office as one of the top performing buildings in the United States.

Other examples of how our Department is carrying out its commitment to the environment are reflected in these statistics from VA's Waste Minimization and Compliance Report. In fiscal year 2002, VA:

- Earned \$1 million in recycling revenue;
- Realized a cost avoidance in the amount of \$777,000, which confirms that recycling programs not only generate revenues for VA, but also substantially decrease expenditures for disposal of wastes;
- Purchased more than \$18 million worth of recycled-content and environmentally preferable products. This impressive figure includes \$7.6 million in recycled paper and \$4.3 million in recycled toner cartridges; and,
- Recycled 28.1 million pounds of materials last fiscal year.

In closing, VA's employees truly are the Department's greatest asset. You ultimately determine the success of VA's programs to protect and preserve our environment, as well as to serve our veterans. I encourage you to keep up all the good work you do and will continue to for our environment, for our Nation's veterans, and for America. Thank you for your commitment and dedication, and have a wonderful Earth Day!

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**John L. Howard, Jr.
Federal Environmental Executive
Office of the Federal Environmental Executive**

Thank you, Chuck.

We have much to be thankful for this day, April 22, 2003, the annual celebration of Earth Day.

It's a great day to be here at VA, and for you to celebrate all your environmental accomplishments and to recognize the winners of your Closing the Circle awards.

Today, our environment is undeniably cleaner than it was 34 years ago. We are more conscious of how our actions impact the environment, and so we are doing more to prevent adverse consequences.

And we know we have much more to do to make needed environmental improvements for today and future generations.

I've had the privilege of working for President Bush for nearly 7 years on natural resource and environmental issues. His vision for environmental protection is focused on results: cleaner air, water and land, and healthier people and ecosystems. And we should be measured on those results -- is the air cleaner, the water purer and the land healthier than when we arrived? The Bush Administration's approach to environmental and natural resource conservation includes both tried and true traditional policies that have proven records of success -- such as the series of regulations for cleaning diesel engines and fuels -- and new, innovative policies that employ market forces, partnerships, performance standards or incentives for stewardship -- such as innovative partnerships to clean up urban contaminated properties and brownfields, using Farm Bill funds to help farmers improve habitat and watersheds, seeking massive reductions in power plant emissions under the Clear Skies legislation, and researching ways to use hydrogen as a fuel to power our economy.

The President recognizes that to achieve these goals, America needs a strong and growing economy, which provides the public and private resources needed to make new investments in environmental technologies and conservation. President Bush sees these goals as complementary -- economic growth and strong environmental protection go hand-in-hand.

The President also recognizes that the greatest opportunities for environmental stewardship are found outside of Washington, D.C., and that states, tribes, local communities and individuals must not only be included in the decision-making process but also must be part of implementing at the ground level.

We are committed to using the best science available to inform our environmental decision-making. We also encourage, through partnerships and funding, innovation and the development and use of new, cleaner technologies that leapfrog the results current technology and policies can provide.

And we continue to build on America's ethic of stewardship and personal responsibility, through education and volunteer opportunities, and in our daily lives. At work, at home, in our communities – with an environmental group, your local house of worship, or your office – we all have opportunities to make a difference and improve the quality of life for all around us.

Last year, President Bush told the Presidential Environmental Youth Award winners, “Good stewardship begins with the simplest of things. What may appear to be a small act is really important: cleaning up a park, or recycling, or [...] showing people how to conserve energy.” “What may seem like a small act when taken alone can produce tremendous results when combined with the efforts of others.”

Our office, the Office of the Federal Environmental Executive, exists to help you and your team be better environmental stewards at work. At VA, you already have made great strides to protect the environment and be better stewards.

For VA and all federal agencies, we can help with your recycling program, or buying more environmentally responsible products and services. We can help improve your building’s energy efficiency, and help you consider other building improvements to make it more sustainable.

And we can help you adopt an environmental management system, a way for you to approach all that you have to do and want to do in a more systematic manner to ensure you can do your job and achieve VA’s mission more effectively.

You each have the opportunity here to improve the environment and, particularly, the health of so many people.

Today, we each have the opportunity to re-commit our resources, energy, time, and creativity to improving others’ lives.

I urge you to re-commit your talents to being a good steward of our resources – to team with others at work, at home, and in your community – and strive to make every day Earth Day.

Thank you.

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Program Remarks By



**Rebecca R. Wodder
President
American Rivers**

Thank you for invitation to join VA in celebrating Earth Day 2003 and recognizing this organization's strong commitment to protecting and preserving environment.

I am a product of the *first* Earth Day, 33 years ago, and I am here to talk about how this annual event got its start and what it has meant over the years.

I hope to leave you with a heightened commitment to protecting the planet and some ideas about how you can make a difference to the quality of the environment and the lives of future generations of Americans.

I'm one of many whose lives have been shaped by Earth Day. In my 30 years as conservationist, I've met many who told same story:

- The first Earth Day triggered an interest,
- That interest grew into lifetime commitment

In the spring of 1970, I was asked to organize the first Earth Day celebration for my community in suburban Omaha, Nebraska.

At the time, I was a High School Senior with an academic interest in biology. I also was a social activist in civil rights.

Earth Day was an epiphany for me: it combined my interests in biology and activism/social change.

Ten years later, I was working on Capitol Hill as a legislative assistant for Gaylord Nelson, founder of Earth Day. It has been my good fortune to celebrate the tenth, twentieth, and thirtieth anniversaries with Gaylord Nelson.

Gaylord Nelson is a tremendous American. He is now in his mid-80s, but still working full-time for the environment as a counselor to The Wilderness Society. In 1995, he was awarded the

Presidential Medal of Freedom—the highest honor given to civilians in the U.S.—for founding Earth Day and inspiring stewardship of natural resources.

Many of today’s environmental leaders came of age with the first Earth Day. It’s a phenomenon that has continued to work for more than 3 decades.

At my organization, we have a staff of 50, ranging from 20 to 60 years of age; one-half trace their decision to devote their career to conservation to a particular Earth Day celebration, usually at a tender age

In fact, Earth Day, and the environmental movement it spawned, may be one of most enduring social movements in our nation’s history.

As Gaylord Nelson tells the story, he got the idea for Earth Day in 1962, while Governor of Wisconsin. For several years, he had been troubled that the environment was a “non-issue” in politics. His primary goal in organizing Earth Day was “to show the political leadership of the Nation that there was broad and deep support for the environmental movement.”

As a first step, he persuaded President Kennedy to raise the profile of the issue by going on a national conservation tour. That happened in September 1963. Unfortunately, for many reasons, the tour did not succeed in putting the issue in the national spotlight.

Gaylord Nelson continued to speak on the issue for several years in many states.

In the summer of 1969, when a lot of “teach-ins” were happening across nation, Gaylord Nelson got the idea of organizing a huge grassroots protest over what was happening to the environment.

In September 1969, Gaylord Nelson announced that in the spring of 1970 there would be a nationwide grassroots demonstration on behalf of the environment and invited everyone to participate.

There was a huge response – inquiries poured in from all across the country.

Gaylord Nelson recruited a few college students, led by then 24-year-old Denis Hayes, to staff a small volunteer office to respond to tremendous public interest.

As Denis himself recalls, “My greatest asset at the time may have been that I was simply too young to know that the job was impossible. So I recruited a staff of similarly young, naïve idealists who also didn’t know it was impossible, so they just did it.”

The remarkable thing about that first Earth Day was that it organized itself. Two thousand colleges and universities, 10,000 high schools and grade schools, and several thousand communities participated.

All together, 20 million Americans took part “in one of the most exciting and significant grassroots efforts in the history of this country.”

According to Gaylord Nelson, “It showed the political and opinion leadership of the country that the people cared, that they were ready for political action, and that the politicians had better get ready, too.”

So, what is the legacy of Earth Day 33 yrs later?

In the first 10 years, there was a flurry of legislative action. Most of the basic environmental laws were enacted: Clean Air, Clean Water, recycling laws, laws to control toxins and pesticides, laws to clean up contaminated places and protect workers from dangerous pollutants, laws to save endangered species, safe drinking water, federal lands protection, and many more.

The results of these laws and the growing public awareness and involvement are impressive:

- Total emissions of 6 principal air pollutants have been cut by 25 percent, even though the U.S. Gross Domestic Product increased 161 percent and energy consumption is up 42 percent;
- Water consumption by industry is down 40 percent since 1979, while productivity is up;
- The bald eagle is no longer endangered;
- The Cuyahoga River no longer catches on fire and the Great Lakes are recovering;
- Millions of people choose to recycle, conserve water and energy, and participate in community cleanups;
- All across America, schools teach environmental science, companies tout environmental friendliness of products, and the media covers environmental stories routinely. Environmental messages are everywhere.
- Perhaps most fundamentally, as Denis Hayes has observed,
 - o “the **right** to a safe, healthy environment—a concept that essentially did not exist before 1970 -- has become an American core value—possessing wider, deeper public support than some values enshrined in the Bill of Rights.”

It’s not all good news, unfortunately.

We are experiencing an extinction crisis unparalleled since time of the dinosaurs.

We have unleashed the forces of global climate change that will be a long time in reversing, ONCE we make the commitment to address this issue.

Droughts and floods are increasing and productive agriculture lands are being lost.

Overpopulation is of grave concern: it would take 5 planets to provide a decent standard of living to the world’s current population.

There are more wars, famine, and destruction of basic life support of our planet.

We are experiencing freshwater shortages: water will be as significant to the 21st century as oil is to the 20th. The U.S. needs to lead the change. The per capita use of water in the U.S. is the highest in the world. We need to be more efficient in our use of water.

Many of the problems we solved in first 30 years were “low hanging fruit,” for example, end-of-pipe air and water pollution. Now, the problems are more complex and dispersed and will take all of us working together to solve them.

What can you do?

Many issues like protecting freshwater quality and quantity are going to be solved at the local and even individual, level.

Non-point pollution is the biggest threat to water quality; for example, pesticides coming off lawns, oil and chemicals coming off roadways. After years of improvement, water quality is now on the decline again due to non-point pollution sources.

Excessive water use and paving over watersheds are the biggest threats to water quantity. Sprawl, for example, demands more and more water, while wetlands and other open landscapes are lost. Drought affected 49 states last summer, even while we wasted trillions of gallons of rainwater and snowmelt.

My own area, river conservation, is one of fastest growing areas of conservation movement. Four thousand local groups have organized to protect their hometown rivers. This is a good way to get involved. Join your local river group. Get to know your watershed address. Make sure your representatives at the county, state and federal levels know YOUR watershed address and are working to protect it.

Fundamentally, our job is to learn how to live sustainably so that our generation does not waste the resources that future generations will need to depend upon.

This will only happen when we, as voters, as consumers, as community members, and as parents, demand this from our elected leaders, from the businesses we patronize, and in the daily decisions we make at home and at work.

Conserve water inside and outside your home:

- A low-flow shower head can save 26,000 gallons per year for a family of four;
- Low-flush toilets can save even more;
- Plant vegetation native to your area, and water at dusk or dawn.

Take care with hazardous products. One quart of oil spilled down the drain contaminates 250,000 gallons of water.

Protect wetlands and open space.

Support land conservation, especially along streams and river corridors. Demand “smart growth” policies that preserve open space.

Organize community cleanups and restoration activities.

Take your children and grandchildren to enjoy the outdoors and to Earth Day events. Experiences like these during childhood are a common thread among people who are aware and engaged in environmental protection.

Provide leadership as exhibited by those receiving awards today.

The environment is something that matters to all of us. The quality of the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat all depend on the environment.

When we hurt the environment, we hurt our children and ourselves.

When we help improve the environment, we give ourselves a brighter today and better tomorrow.

This is the great lesson of Earth Day – a lesson we should never forget.